

Let's Talk About...

Language development

Language is used to remember, plan, and make sense of the world. We need language to feel in control and form social bonds with others.

Children's language skills develop slowly and in stages. From birth, babies connect words they hear with feelings and actions. They know more than they can say and begin responding to your voice at 3 days old. When you respond to your baby's first coos, they learn that these sounds help them connect with the world.

After children begin babbling (at about 4 months old), it's easier for you to know what they're saying, what they want, and how they're feeling. If your child doesn't babble or imitate sounds by 7 months old, they may have a hearing or speech development problem. Take your child to the doctor immediately. They may have partial hearing loss or even have fluid in their middle ear. Hearing well is crucial for developing speech and language.

Receptive (What child understands)	Expressive (What child says)
Birth to 3 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can tell the difference between human speech and other noises • Responds to familiar voice and sounds • Can tell the difference between angry and pleasant voices • Looks at speaker • Sucks faster to sounds of human voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matches body movements with caregiver's language • Has different cries for hunger, pain, and anger • Begins cooing • Often vocalizes with 2 or more syllables • Will coo when you talk to them
4 to 6 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves head or body to find sound • Recognizes own name • Recognizes familiar words like "Mommy," "Daddy," and "bye-bye" • Responds to friendly or angry voices and tones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeats a series of the same sounds (babababa) • Stops babbling when someone else is speaking • Babbles more when you interact with them
7 to 9 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to simple phrases such as "Get the ball" • Stops activity when told "no" or when you call their name • Pays attention for up to 1 minute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses gestures to communicate • Babbling becomes sentence-like, but without true words • Imitates sounds • Changes babbling for different people and situations • Listens to others' speech, then responds

Receptive (What child understands)	Expressive (What child says)
10 to 12 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases attention span Understands simple vocal or physical instructions Pays attention up to 1 minute Is aware that speech helps them connect with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to say first words, like “Mama,” “Dada,” or “bye-bye” Tries to imitate new words Points at objects that interest them Connects action with words (waves “bye-bye”) Uses 1 or more words with meaning (this may be part of a word)
13 to 18 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies 1 body part Comprehends simple questions Understands what many nouns (people, places, or things) mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates with true words and gestures Repeats words overheard in conversation Watches others to see if they understand Has a vocabulary of 5–20 words
19 to 24 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies up to 5 body parts Identifies common objects and pictures when named Recognizes new words daily Understands some complex sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks up to 150–300 words Begins using two-word sentences Begins using pronouns Refers to self by name Begins talking about things they’re interested in—things that move, do something, or things they can do something with
3 years	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands comparisons such as little and big, hot and cold Focuses on activities for up to 10 minutes Understands what objects do, such as a toaster Understands at least 3 prepositions (usually in, on, under) Understands most simple questions about activities and environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses sentences with 3–6 words Uses a vocabulary of almost 1,000 words Repeats up to 3 numbers Uses pronouns such as I, you, and me correctly Uses some words in plural and past tense Handles three-word sentences easily Is understandable about 90% of the time Can give their name, sex, and age Tells experiences so you can reasonably follow the story
4 years	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies basic colors Shows interest in “why” and “how” questions Knows the names of familiar animals Understands contrasts such as longer, or larger Easily follows simple (one-step) commands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses complex ideas in short sentences Counts to 10 Uses up to 1,500 words Begins using past tense correctly Repeats words, phrases, syllables, and even sounds Names common objects in picture books or magazines

Receptive (What child understands)	Expressive (What child says)
5 years	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows two- or three-step complex commands • Understands right and left • Follows 3 commands given without interruptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses five- or six-word sentences • Usually understandable by others • Knows most of the basic language rules • Knows common opposites like big/little, hard/soft, or heavy/light • Grasps simple time concepts, like morning, afternoon, night, day, later, after, tomorrow, yesterday, and today • Usually has grammatically correct speech

What if I have other questions?

If you have questions about your child’s speech, talk to your child’s doctor or a speech language pathologist at one of our pediatric rehab centers.

- **Primary Children’s Hospital Main Campus (inpatient only)**
100 North Mario Capecchi Drive (fourth floor)
Salt Lake City, UT 84113
Phone: 801.662.4949
- **Primary Children’s Rehabilitation Services at Bountiful**
280 North Main Street (second floor)
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: 801.397.8700
- **Pediatric Rehab at Dixie Regional Medical Center (lower level of Health and Performance Center)**
652 South Medical Center Drive
St. George, UT 84790
Phone: 435.251.2250
- **Primary Children’s Rehabilitation Services at Layton**
201 West Layton Parkway (third floor)
Layton, UT 84041
Phone: 801.543.6630
- **Pediatric Rehab at Logan Hospital**
500 East 1400 North, Suite W
Logan, UT 84341
Phone: 435.716.6440
- **Pediatric Rehab at Orem Community Hospital**
527 West 400 North
Orem, UT 84057
Phone: 801.714.3505
- **Primary Children’s Rehabilitation Services at Riverton**
3741 West 12600 South, Suite 100
Riverton, UT 84065
Phone: 801.571.3081
- **Primary Children’s Rehabilitation Services at Taylorsville**
3845 West 4700 South (second floor)
Taylorsville, UT 84118
Phone: 801.840.4360
- **Primary Children’s Rehabilitation Services at TOSH**
5770 South Fashion Blvd., Building 5, Suite 210
Murray, UT 84107
Phone: 801.314.5520

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